

Lewisville Leader > News

Council approves housing rehab program

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LEWISVILLE- City council members approved a program meant to repair and rehabilitate homes in Lewisville and improve the overall neighborhood appearance.

During Monday's city council meeting, the Lewisville Housing Rehabilitation Program (LHRP) was approved by a vote of 3 to 1. Councilman John Gorena was the sole dissenting vote.

"I voted against this because I don't think we should be spending tax dollars to fix up private homes," Gorena said. "I don't think it's a smart investment. We should do what cities are supposed to do -- provide fire, streets and police. Let's let private citizens buy the homes and fix them up."

The LHRP is meant to improve neighborhoods and maintain property values and the tax base and protect the health and safety of Lewisville residents.

"We want to concentrate on units that need to be rehabilitated in order to bring the value back up," said Nika Reineke, economic development and planning director. "We want this program to run the way we want it to run. We can set up the guidelines the way we want, as long as it still complies with the federal requirements."

The LHRP is a part of the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program, which is how it is funded. It provides assistance to residents for eligible home projects. Residents who are approved for the program could receive up to \$30,000 in grants, or forgivable loans, for "necessary repairs to support safe, decent and sanitary housing."

The program will begin with three application workshops. The first will be from 1 to 3 p.m. July 7 at Memorial Park Recreation Center; the second from 10 a.m. to noon July 9 at city hall and the third from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. July 13 at city hall. Applications will be due July 29.

"During the workshops, we'll do an overview of the program and discuss how to fill out the applications," said Jamey Kirby, grants coordinator. "We strongly encourage people to attend the workshops, but if they miss the workshops, they may still apply for the program."

The LHRP grants may be used to repair heating, ventilation, air conditioning, foundation and plumbing among other repairs. They may also be used for energy efficiency, weatherization, handicap accessibility and any additional work needed to restore properties to meet local codes and standards.

The grant money may not be used for acquisition of land, swimming pools, sprinkler systems, storage sheds, retaining walls, home additions or luxury items.

"We have three neighborhoods identified as needing the rehabilitation the most," Reineke said.

The neighborhoods are all on the east side of I-35 and include the area bounded by College and Mill streets and Mullen Avenue, McKenzie-Hembry and Edna-Charles. Reineke said even though those are the targeted areas, the program is open to all residents who qualify.

In order to qualify for the program, applicants must be homeowners of single-family units, reside in Lewisville for at least two years, own and occupy the home for at least six months and be up-to-date on taxes, utilities, insurance and mortgage payments. Applicants may be U.S. citizens, non-citizen nationals or resident aliens, which is federal policy. In addition, the value of the home after rehab may not exceed \$150,000 -- except for substandard housing referrals.

"In addition, residents must occupy the home for five to 10 years after rehab, depending on how much money they receive," Reineke said. "Should the resident sell or rent the home, they must repay the grant."

Residents who receive \$10,000 or less must live in the home for at least five years. The loan can be pro-rated after 60 months. Residents receiving more than \$10,000 must live in the home for at least 10 years. The loan can be pro-rated after 120 months.

Selection for the program will be based on a priority scoring system. The categories of scoring include elderly or disabled residents, income level, proximity to the A-train, and substandard housing referrals. In order to qualify for LHRP, residents' income may not exceed 80 percent of the area medium income (AMI). For example, 80 percent of the AMI for a two-person household is \$44,250. Those who qualify will also be required to make a one-time co-payment, which is determined by their AMI level.

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